

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 05704 061132Z
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PM-05 NSC-05
SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 /053 W
-----035292 061139Z /14
P R 051730Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8316
INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN
AMCONSUL KADUNA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, NI
SUBJECT: DOCTORS VS THE FMG

REF: LAGOS 5598

1. AT THE PRESENT TIME, NIGERIAN MEDICAL DOCTORS FIND THEMSELVES IN A STATE OF SMOLDERING CONFRONTATION WITH THE FMG ON THE BASIS OF THREE SEPARATE ISSUES:
--THE PRIVATE PRACTICE DECREE. EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE FMG PROMULGATED A DECREE, EFFECTIVE JUNE 1, BANNING THE PRIVATE PRACTICE OF DOCTORS EMPLOYED IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS. THE DECREE ALSO PROHIBITS DOCTORS WITH LESS THAN FIVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE FROM GOING INTO PRIVATE PRACTICE. MOST DIRECTLY AFFECTED ARE DOCTORS EMPLOYED IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITALS WHO DERIVE A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF THEIR INCOME FROM TREATING PRIVATE PATIENTS ON THE SIDE. (THE DECREE ALSO AFFECTS OTHER GOVERNMENT EMPLOYED PROFESSIONALS SUCH AS LAWYERS; HOWEVER, DOCTORS HAVE BEEN THE MOST VOCIFEROUS IN THEIR OPPOSITION.)
--TAX RECEIPTS. IN AN ACTION AIMED AT TAX EVASION, THE FMG ALSO RECTNTLY DECREED THAT GOVERNMENT-OWNED HOSPITALS

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COULD DEMAND THAT PATIENTS PRODUCE INCOME TAX RECEIPTS BEFORE BEING ADMITTED.
--REVISION OF SALARY GRADES AND CAREER STRUCTURES FOR MEDICAL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE CIVIL SERVICE. DOCTORS AND CERTAIN PARAMEDICAL PERSONNEL INCLUDING RADIOGRAPHERS, DENTAL TECHNICIANS AND PHYSICAL THEAPHISTS WILL ENTER THE SERVICE AT LOWER GRADES THAN HAD PREVIOUSLY

BEEN THE CASE.

2. COMMENT: THE LOGIC BEHIND ALL THREE ACTIONS BY THE FMG IS THE CURRENT FINANCIAL CRUNCH; HOWEVER, THEY HAVE GENERATED SERIOUS CONTROVERSY WITH THE MEDICAL PROFESSION. IN APRIL, THE NIGERIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (NAM) ASKED ALL DOCTORS TO ABIDE BY THE PRIVATE PRACTICE DECREE WHILE NEVERTHELESS EXPRESSING DOUBTS ABOUT WHETHER IT WAS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE NIGERIAN PEOPLE CONSIDERING THE LOW DOCTOR/PATIENT RATION IN THE COUNTRY. OUR FACULTY CONTACTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS (UNILAG) TELL US THAT THE DECREE HAS PRODUCED GREAT BITTERNESS AMONG DOCTORS AT THE MEDICAL SCHOOL WHO CLAIM THEY NEED TO TREAT OUTSIDE PATIENTS TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES FINANCIALLY. THERE ARE RUMORS OF MASS RESIGNATIONS BY UNILAG DOCTORS UNLESS THE DECREE IS REVOKED OR MODIFIED BY JUNE 1. WE UNDERSTAND FURTHER THAT THE TAX RECEIPT REQUIREMENT IS NOW GENERALLY BEING APPLIED IN HOSPITALS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, A NUMBER OF STATES HAVE SAID THEY WILL NOT ENFORCE THE REQUIREMENT. ALL THREE PROBLEMS WERE THE SUBJECT OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE NAM HELD IN BENIN CITY LAST WEEK.

WYMAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEDICAL DOCTORS, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LAGOS05704
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780193-1018
Format: TEL
From: LAGOS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780589/aaaacyfy.tel
Line Count: 85
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 50cacba3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 LAGOS 5598
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2779998
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DOCTORS VS THE FMG
TAGS: PGOV, TBIO, NI
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/50cacba3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014